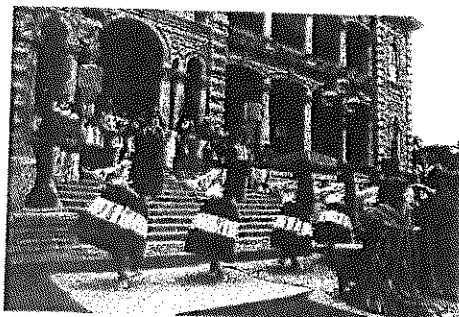


Halau Hula

By ReadWorks



The bright sun came through Maya's window, waking her up from her deep sleep. Maya rubbed her eyes and wondered what day it was. She had been dreaming about swimming in a giant pool of ice cream. She licked her lips, remembering how wonderful it had been to have a steady supply of her favorite dessert. Suddenly, she realized it was Monday. She was late for dance practice! She jumped out of bed, quickly pulled on a long, white dress, and rushed out the door.

Five minutes later, she found the rest of her dance class sitting underneath a bunch of palm trees. They were in the backyard of her *halau hula*, a school that teaches hula dance. Hula is the traditional dance form of Hawaii. Maya's *kumu hula*, or hula teacher, stood waiting in front of the students, who were all fanning themselves in the heat. The hula teacher felt very strongly that people should be on time. This was just one of her many rules. Altogether, her rules formed the *kapu*, a set of rules that all her students had to obey. Traditionally, in these dance schools, dancers believed that if they followed these rules, they would receive blessings from the gods that could increase their dancing talent. Maya's hula teacher also had strict rules about keeping yourself clean. She even had rules against eating most sugar, including sugarcane, a popular snack in Hawaii. This was the hardest rule for Maya to follow. She thought back to her dream of ice cream while she quietly sat with the other students. She hoped she wouldn't get in trouble for being late.

"All right, well now that we're all here..." the *kumu hula* started, giving Maya a look. "Tomorrow we start getting ready for your graduation."

The girls and boys looked at one another in excitement. They had been training for months in order to graduate and become professional hula dancers. They would start off as *olapa*, the agile or quick ones. They are given many dancing parts. Once they have danced long enough, they become a part of the *ho'oppa*, the steadfast, dedicated ones. The *ho'oppa* usually sit on the ground and play music while the *olapa* dance.

"That means that you all must stay in the *halau* unless you have a very good reason to leave. We'll only practice once a day in order to let your bodies rest," the hula teacher told her students.

Maya and her friends all let out a sigh of relief. They had been practicing more than usual in order to prepare for their big graduation performance. After their teacher finished explaining the schedule for the next week, the girls and boys got up to eat breakfast. They walked to the kitchen. Fresh fruits were already spread across the table. Maya picked up a mango and a knife and began to cut the fruit.

As she passed mango slices to her friends, they shared their excitement for graduation.

"I can't wait to see my family!" a boy named Keanu said. Everyone nodded their heads, agreeing. It had been a month since everyone had seen their family and friends. They loved living at the dance school, but they could not leave whenever they wanted to. They couldn't wait to celebrate with their friends and family.

A week passed. Finally, it was the night before graduation. The boys and girls spent the evening practicing. They wore their costumes and danced to make sure the performance would go smoothly. Both the girls and boys wore *lei* around their heads. They had each made these garlands out of plants found near their school. They strapped *kupe'e* bracelets around their ankles and wrists. These were made of whale teeth and bone, and the bracelets made a soft sound as they moved. Both girls and boys wore skirts, or *pa'u*, made out of tree bark. The girls' skirts were painted with beautiful designs.

After they finished dancing, the entire group walked to the beach nearby. They walked into the water as a ceremonial bathing ritual. "The water is meant to clean and purify you before your performance tomorrow," the *kumu hula* told them. She walked into the white waves, too. When they returned to the school, the hula teacher sprinkled each of their faces with holy water. Their teacher was proud to share the traditional rituals and ceremonies that her mother and grandmother had shown her. She wanted to preserve the art of hula through the passing classes of students, to keep it alive and unchanged. She hoped that her own daughter, who was graduating with Maya, would continue the traditions when she became old enough.

The students rested after the ritual. Then, they sat down to eat with family and friends. Everyone hugged and kissed each other with joy at being together again. Then, the teacher explained the purpose of the feast.

"Now, we take part in the *'ailolo* feast. This marks the end of my students' training. After this meal, they will officially be hula dancers," she said. As she spoke, a pig was brought to the large table. This was a traditional part of the feast. Maya looked around the table at all her friends' smiling faces. She was relieved she had made it so far in her training but was nervous to start her job as a professional dancer.

Once they finished the meal, the students went to get ready for their performance. They put on their traditional hula costumes. They lined up, ready to perform for an audience for the first time ever. Maya looked out into the audience. She could see the smiling faces of her mom, dad, and little brother. She felt the soft grass between her toes and thanked the gods for letting her family come to see her dance. The music began, and she stepped out, finally, as a hula dancer.